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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 000952

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [KISL](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR ON PEACE IN MINDANAO

REF: A. MANILA 923

- [1](#)B. MANILA 828
- [1](#)C. MANILA 787
- [1](#)D. MANILA 782
- [1](#)E. MANILA 594
- [1](#)F. MANILA 281

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Classified By: CDA Paul W. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: Presidential Peace Process Advisor Dureza told Charge that he welcomed increased Embassy engagement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), local and national leaders in support of the peace process. Separately, chief government negotiator Afable said the Cabinet would consider territorial concessions to the MILF on March 22, to be rolled out publicly only after the May 14 elections. The government is trying to balance its engagement of the MILF and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Dureza said, and promote a dialogue between them. Negotiations continue with the envoy of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) on plans for a tri-partite conference in Jeddah during July 2007 to review the implementation of the MNLF peace agreement. Dureza said the government was targeting 2007 to bring together all elements of the complex Mindanao peace process, noting that signing an agreement with the MILF absent understandings with the MNLF, local Muslim, Christian, and indigenous leaders, would not resolve Mindanao's security. End Summary.

Increased U.S. Engagement Welcomed

[1](#)2. (C) Charge briefed Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process Secretary Jesus "Jess" Dureza March 20 on increased U.S. engagement of stakeholders in the MILF Peace Process. Stakeholders include the MILF, Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), indigenous peoples, Congress, Local Government Units, Regional Government of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, traditional Muslim leaders, civil society/non-governmental organizations, foreign governments, and the business community. Charge explained to Secretary Dureza that the U.S. approach was intended to complement Malaysia's important role as host to the MILF peace talks and leader of the International Monitoring Team, and that our Embassy in Kuala Lumpur was keeping Malaysian officials apprised of our approach.

13. (C) Dureza welcomed greater U.S. engagement and said that after the May 14 elections such engagement would be critical to gaining the support of Congress and Local Government Units for the creation of a new Muslim-led political entity in Mindanao. He commented that Malaysia has become more open to a U.S. role, prompted by the MILF, which sees greater USG involvement as in their interest.

Territory Remains Key Issue

14. (C) Although the Government's offer of self-determination was well received by the MILF, territory remained the key issue in the negotiations, according to Dureza. Both parties were continuing their efforts to reach a compromise on territory through back channel communications with the Malaysian Government. Malaysia did not want to resume exploratory talks in Kuala Lumpur before some compromise was reached on this contentious issue because another impasse would not bode well for the peace process.

15. (S) As promised in our last meeting, Secretary Afable provided Charge with maps depicting the Malaysian proposal to restart the peace talks, and the government assessment of the MILF's bottom line. The maps depict a significantly scaled back MILF position, yet one that seeks certain Christian-majority areas. Afable said the cabinet would meet March 22 to decide whether to put new territorial concessions on the table. Charge said the U.S. Mission would seek to focus political and development engagement on the most contentious localities to mitigate political tensions once these issues became public. Afable noted that Congress would have to pass a referendum law, and then a local-level referendum would need to be held to include territory in the new political entity. During the months ahead, Afable hoped

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to gain Congressional support for a referendum at the barangay rather than provincial level to improve chances for majority votes in those areas pinpointed for inclusion.

Better Military Line-Up On The Ground

16. (C) Dureza was optimistic that military personnel changes and a presidential directive would help maintain peace on the ground. President Arroyo issued a clear directive for closer cooperation between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and established peace process mechanisms with the MILF following the March 6-7 clashes in Midsayap, North Cotabato (refs b and d). The replacement of 6th Army Infantry Division Major-General Nehemias Pajarito with Major-General Raymundo Ferrer from the 1st Infantry Division would help restore the primacy of the peace process in central Mindanao, said Dureza. He was also pleased that the government's delegate to the Joint Ceasefire Committee, Brigadier-General Edgardo Gurrea, was assigned as Deputy Commander, Eastern Mindanao Command, ensuring that command's connection to the overall peace process.

MNLF Is Key Stakeholder in MILF Peace Process

17. (C) Dureza highlighted the importance of carefully calibrated and balanced engagement with the MILF and MNLF during the peace process so that each party would not perceive itself as ignored or excluded. According to Dureza, Malaysia expressed concern that MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari was becoming prominent too quickly through his candidacy for Sulu Governor (ref a).

18. (C) Dureza said that MNLF Chairman Misuari recently

agreed to accept MNLF factions, including the "Council of 15," back into his fold. While noting that it was unrealistic to expect a merger between the more unified MNLF and the MILF, Dureza expressed support for the promotion of a dialogue between the two organizations. He said Malaysia and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) were aware of the need to promote such a dialogue, but did not seem confident that either was doing enough. At some point, a discrete meeting needed to be arranged between MNLF Chairman Misuari and MILF Chairman Al-Haj Murad Ebrahim.

Will Misuari Attend Tri-Partite Meeting in Jeddah?

¶9. (C) The Preparatory and Final GRP-MNLF-OIC Tri-Partite Conferences to review implementation of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement will be held back-to-back during July 2007 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. As a confidence building measure between the MNLF and MILF, Dureza suggested that an MILF observer be allowed to attend this conference, but he did not indicate that idea had been accepted so far.

¶10. (C) Although the OIC has requested MNLF Chairman Misuari to lead the MNLF delegation to Jeddah, Dureza commented that approval by the Makati Regional Trial Court for Misuari's travel abroad remained uncertain.

Comment

¶11. (C) Bringing together the MILF and MNLF peace processes, and gaining support from local and national leaders is both a critical and ambitious task to establishing security in Mindanao. It is also essential to transform Mindanao into a region that does not offer sanctuary to international terrorists. Embassy has established a peace process steering committee of key sections, agencies, and the U.S. Joint Special Operations Task Force to ensure we gain maximum synergies toward this goal.

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